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ABSTRACT

The problem of ill prepared college freshmen in remedial/developmental classes across the nation has significantly increased. At the same time, colleges and universities are increasingly concerned about college student retention. The study compared the belief structures of two groups: those enrolled in two remedial reading classes, and those involved in "honors" classes. Study results pinpointed emotional irresponsibility and motivation as two significant, non-intellectual differences between the two groups, and both conditions were noted as directly influencing success or failure in college. Student counseling and a focus on more personal responsibility agendas, in addition to reading rate/comprehension skill development, are suggested as partial remedies. Contains six references. (GLR)

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Cognitive Differences Between Honors and Remedial Students

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RUNNING HEAD: Cognitive Differences

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Abstract

The problem of ill prepared college freshmen in remedial/developmental classes across the nation has significantly increased. At the same time, colleges and universities are increasingly concerned about college student retention. The present study investigates non-intellectual characteristics which may be operative in college success or failure. Implications for remedial instructors are discussed.

Across the United States, every year large numbers of high school students attempt to enter college. Good students receive scholarships, while poor students are accepted conditionally or "on probation". Other marginal students are often counseled or encouraged to take a wide variety of developmental or remedial courses. These include basic writing skills, study skills, basic math, skills and reading rate/ comprehension skills. The basic premise underlining many of the classes is that many students have specific skill deficits which can be remediated via these classes or rectified so that the student can do college work.

On the other side of the coin are the "honor" students who are on scholarship and attend special "honors" classes. Generally, these accelerated classes provide additional stimulation and academic challenge. These students are thought to be widely read and prepared to do intensive college work. The cognitive structures of said students are thought to be more highly developed than the thinking skills of remedial students.

There is some research indicating that self defeating behaviors can be attributed to specific irrational beliefs. Albert Ellis, founder of Rational

Emotive Therapy links emotional disturbance to irrational, illogical self statements. Woods (1984) has developed and "Irrational Belief Test" in an attempt to measure 10 central belief systems. These ten domains are:

1. Demand for Approval
2. High Self Expectations
3. Blame Proneness
4. Frustration Reactive
5. Emotional Irresponsibility
6. Anxious Overconcern
7. Problem Avoidance
8. Dependency
9. Helplessness for Change
10. Perfectionism

These scales have identified those with anger/anxiety problems (Woods & Coggin, 1985), and those who engage in specific self defeating behaviors such as smoking (Shaughnessy, Adams, & Wheland, 1990) and overeating (Shaughnessy and Tokarski, 1990).

The present exploratory study was conducted to compare the belief structures of two groups--those enrolled in two remedial reading classes, and those involved in "honors" classes. It was hypothesized that

there would be significant differences between these two groups.

Many recent theoreticians have indicated that there are other variables besides intelligence that contribute to success. Sternberg (1986) has indicated 20 reasons why average to above average students do not do well. Odom and Shaughnessy (1989) have found certain personality factors operative in academic success. The present study attempted to ascertain if there were any irrational beliefs which separated the high honors group from the low remedial group. Since only college students were involved, no significant differences in rational/irrational beliefs were hypothesized.

Procedure

Two honors classes in history and communications were administered the IBT under standardized optimal conditions. In addition, students enrolled in two remedial reading classes were also given the IBT tests, again, under optimal standardized conditions.

Results:

The means and standard deviation for the two groups are given below.

		ACS		HONORS	
		x	SD	x	SD
1	DA	26.3	6.4	26.4	7.6
2	HSE	30.3	5.2	32.3	6.7
3	BP	31.0	4.6	32.7	5.1
4	FR	29.6	4.1	29.6	4.9
5	EI	28.2	3.1	24.1	5.7
6	AO	31.1	4.7	31.1	6.7
7	PA	27.9	3.8	26.3	6.2
8	D	30.7	4.1	29.8	6.5
9	HC	28.0	5.5	25.7	5.3
10	P	27.7	6.6	27.5	6.3

There are significant differences on two scales. These differences are seen to be relevant to the academic difficulty of said developmental study. Emotional irresponsibility was one significant

difference between the honors and remedial students. The instructors of these classes reported that students were often late, did not attend classes, failed to hand in assignments and "lost their books." It is not known what other behavioral manifestations of "emotional irresponsibility" are exhibited, but we may safely infer that certain students might fail to study, review their notes and adequately prepare for class and tests.

The second scale "Receptiveness to Change" is also of interest. These students may see themselves as unable to change either their habits or their self perceptions of themselves as poor students. They may have been poor students in high school and may not believe these remedial classes can "make a difference" or can assist them in changing. Motivation is obviously a major factor as demonstrated in a study by Dodd and Shaughnessy (1989).

While note-taking, test taking and study skills may be all well and good, instructors may want to focus on more personal responsibility agendas in addition to reading rate/comprehension skills. Counseling may be a more than necessary adjunct to a developmental program. In addition, low functioning students must believe or learn to believe that they can improve and change. Unless this agenda is addressed, minimal improvement

may be forthcoming from developmental classes. Further research is already underway to ascertain if a similar profile emanates for students in remedial math classes, and remedial writing classes. This hypothesis seems tenable, but further specific research is needed. It may also be helpful to pinpoint those students with high emotional irresponsibility scores and differentiate them from simply weak students with poor study skills. This addition to the assessment of study skills behavior (Dodd and Shaughnessy, 1989) may be of major import in remedial developmental education.

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